



Social media & eating disorders: Connecting with those who may be struggling

Eating disorders—such as anorexia, bulimia, Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID), and binge eating disorders—are potentially life-threatening and can benefit from treatment and intervention.

When it comes to eating disorders, each person's experience and story differs. The guidance and support offered here does not presume to understand each individual's unique experience, but does provide some basic guidelines and tools if you or a friend is struggling.

Facebook and Instagram have collaborated with The National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA) and Nancy Zucker, PhD, Director of the Duke Center for Eating Disorders to help provide support and guidance if you are worried about a friend who may be showing signs of an eating disorder. This guidance is not a substitute for medical advice. You should contact your health care provider if you believe you have an eating disorder, and should encourage your friend to do the same if you believe that they are at risk.

Signs on social media that your friend may be struggling

While determining whether someone is in distress can be difficult, it is always worth reaching out to a friend if you are concerned. Here are a few signs of distress to look out for:

- **ISOLATION:** Perhaps the individual is isolating themselves from others – the person may stop returning phone calls or using social media, usually leaves social gatherings very early, cancels plans, and/or stops initiating plans altogether.
- **SADNESS:** They may seem to be weighted down by sadness; the individual's posts seem dominated by self-judgment (for example, using hashtags like #worthless #failure #disgusting); the person may complain of low energy or poor concentration; or stop posting things they are looking forward to.
- **PREOCCUPATION/OBSESSION:** Their posts have been taken over by content related to food, dieting, or exercise.
- **EMOTIONAL DISTANCE:** You may feel that you are losing your sense of that person because the content posted is no longer about what they think and feel – but rather about what they eat and burn.

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THINGS YOU CAN DO

on Social Media to Help a Friend Struggling with an Eating Disorder.



REACH OUT DIRECTLY TO THE PERSON — IN PRIVATE

Often, people do not like discussing their well being publicly, so it is best to use private forms of communication to reach out to someone you're worried about. The intent and emotions in posts can often be challenging to figure out, so reaching out to the person directly is important. The effort of messaging a friend to meet up or talk on the phone, or even just to express concern and ask questions, can show how much you care.

NEVER ASSUME: OBSERVE, ASK, AND LISTEN

Describe what you have noticed and stick with how you feel about it and what you are willing to do (the “I” statement strategy). Don't make assumptions or toss around labels.

- “I have noticed your posts have been self-critical lately. I care about you, and I hate to see you treating yourself like that. Do you feel like telling me what is going on?”
- “This new diet that you have been on seems to be taking over. It seems like that is all you talk or post about. I am worried you are slipping away from me and I miss you.”

THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE WILLING TO DO TO HELP YOUR FRIEND IF THEY ARE READY TO RECEIVE HELP IN ADVANCE

- Accompany your friend to an appointment.
- Relate by sharing something you are trying to overcome, ask for their help and support one-another.
- Send periodic texts of encouragement.
- Have some meals with them.
 - Meals are a time that signs of an eating disorder may come up, which can make it difficult to know what to say or do. Company during meals can provide everything from healthy distraction, to an example of a healthy attitude towards food. Instead of guessing what they need, ask your friend what would be helpful from you during a meal. For example, some people don't want to talk about their eating behavior during meals, while others might want support if they're eating too little or too fast.
- Go on walks with them so they can resist the urge to over-exercise.
 - Exercise is another time you may notice possible eating disorder behavior. Ask your friend what would be helpful from you during exercise. Do they need a role model who exercises in moderation? Or possibly someone to help decide when to stop exercising. Alternatively, do they just need company on days that they've decided not to exercise?

In general, asking your friend what they feel you can do to help is a good starting place. This can give them a subtle and encouraging sense of control, rather than pushing support on them. There is no right or wrong to how much you are willing to do, but backing up your words with actions helps build trust.

MODEL SELF COMPASSION AND RESPECT

- Do your posts reflect your own self-respect, self-kindness, and self-care? When individuals have struggled with an eating disorder for a long time, they often lack a concrete vision of what recovery would look like – or that being kind to oneself is an option. Seeing others live a life of self-care can give them something to aim for.
- Acknowledge that even if you're posting positive or funny updates on social media, your life isn't always perfect and it's okay to talk about struggles. It's okay to feel unkind to oneself, it's responding in a healthy way that's key.

ENCOURAGE SELF-RESPECT

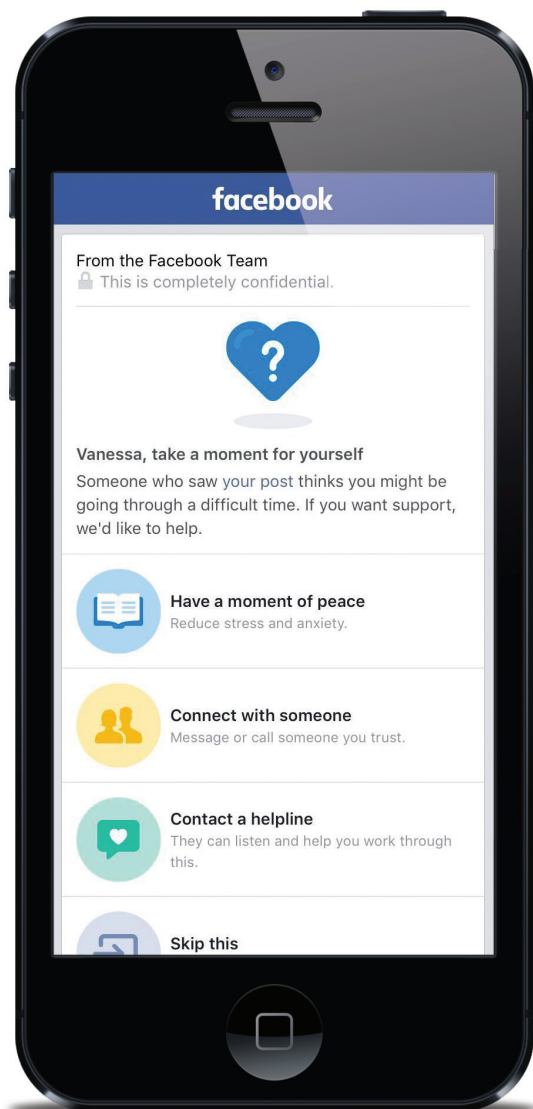
- When your friend posts something positive and healthy, praise it online and offline.

IF POSSIBLE, TRY NOT TO:

- Place shame, blame or guilt on your friend about their appearance, actions or attitudes.
- Use pointed "you" statements such as, "You are getting too skinny!" or "You need to eat more."
- Give simple solutions. For example, "If you'd just stop dieting, then everything would be fine!"



How do Facebook and Instagram offer support to people who may have eating disorders?



If a friend posts something on social media that makes you worry they are treating their body in an unhealthy way, it is important to reach out. Reaching out can help your friend recognize there's an issue. Facebook and Instagram have tools to help you make this connection.

Facebook and Instagram have dedicated teams reviewing reported content as quickly as possible. When necessary, the teams will reach out to the person who posted it and offer support and options for help. These teams will not let the person know who reported the concerning content.

TO LET FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM KNOW ABOUT A POST THAT INDICATES SOMEONE MAY BE STRUGGLING WITH AN EATING DISORDER, FOLLOW THE STEPS BELOW.

ON FACEBOOK:

- Click the carrot at the top right of the post
- Choose "Report post"
- Choose the option most related to self-harm or self-injury; this is sometimes found under an "Other" category
- Once reported, you will see several options of how to take action, including having Facebook review the post
- You also can visit [Facebook.com/report](https://www.facebook.com/report) to find more instructions about reporting on Facebook

ON INSTAGRAM:

- Tap the three dots next to the post
- Click "Report"
- Click "It's Inappropriate"
- Select "Self injury"
- Click "Report"



In addition, you can report someone who may be suicidal to Facebook [directly here](#). On Instagram, you can click on the 'three dots' button on the bottom right corner of every post. Keep in mind that if the person has made an explicit threat of suicide, you should call 911 or a suicide hotline immediately.

Instagram and Facebook have Community Standards, and content that promotes or encourages any type of self-injury, including posts that might encourage others to do something that is not healthy, may be removed for the safety of the community.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY:



THE NATIONAL EATING DISORDERS ASSOCIATION supports and advocates on behalf of and supporting individuals and families affected by eating disorders.

nationaleatingdisorders.org
Helpline: 800-931-2237



NANCY ZUCKER, PHD, DIRECTOR OF THE DUKE CENTER FOR EATING DISORDERS, a center which offers personalized treatment for the full spectrum of eating disorders and body image issues across the lifespan.

dukeeatingdisorders.com



THE MIX provides information and emotional support for young people in the UK, enabling them to make the right choices.

themix.org.uk

